CHAPTER 1

The Planning Process

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The Planning Process

As we embark on the 21st century, several factors will have a significant impact on classroom space and its utility. The number of young people entering our schools has been on the rise since the 1980's and this number is projected to increase. At the same time these additional students enter our schools, an effort is being made to reduce class size in order to provide more individual attention, particularly for children in the early grades and to accommodate updated learning methods.

The demand is great for schools to enhance academic excellence, use up-to-date technology, integrate the community into learning and provide energy efficient facilities that ultimately provide a safe and productive learning environment. Adequate time and resources must be allocated to the planning process for such schools. This is true whether the district is planning a construction project or a comprehensive facilities master plan. Such a plan must address the school district's educational plan, financial plan and facility needs assessment. It is necessary for the school board, working in concert with the superintendent, to provide leadership in developing a collaborative planning effort involving teachers, parents and other stakeholders, throughout the process.

There are a variety of ways to approach the implementation of a construction project. The Planning Process Diagram on the following page was contributed as a proven approach that has been successful with school districts in Illinois. The diagram depicts the planning process and highlights the essential components that lead to the implementation of a successful construction project.

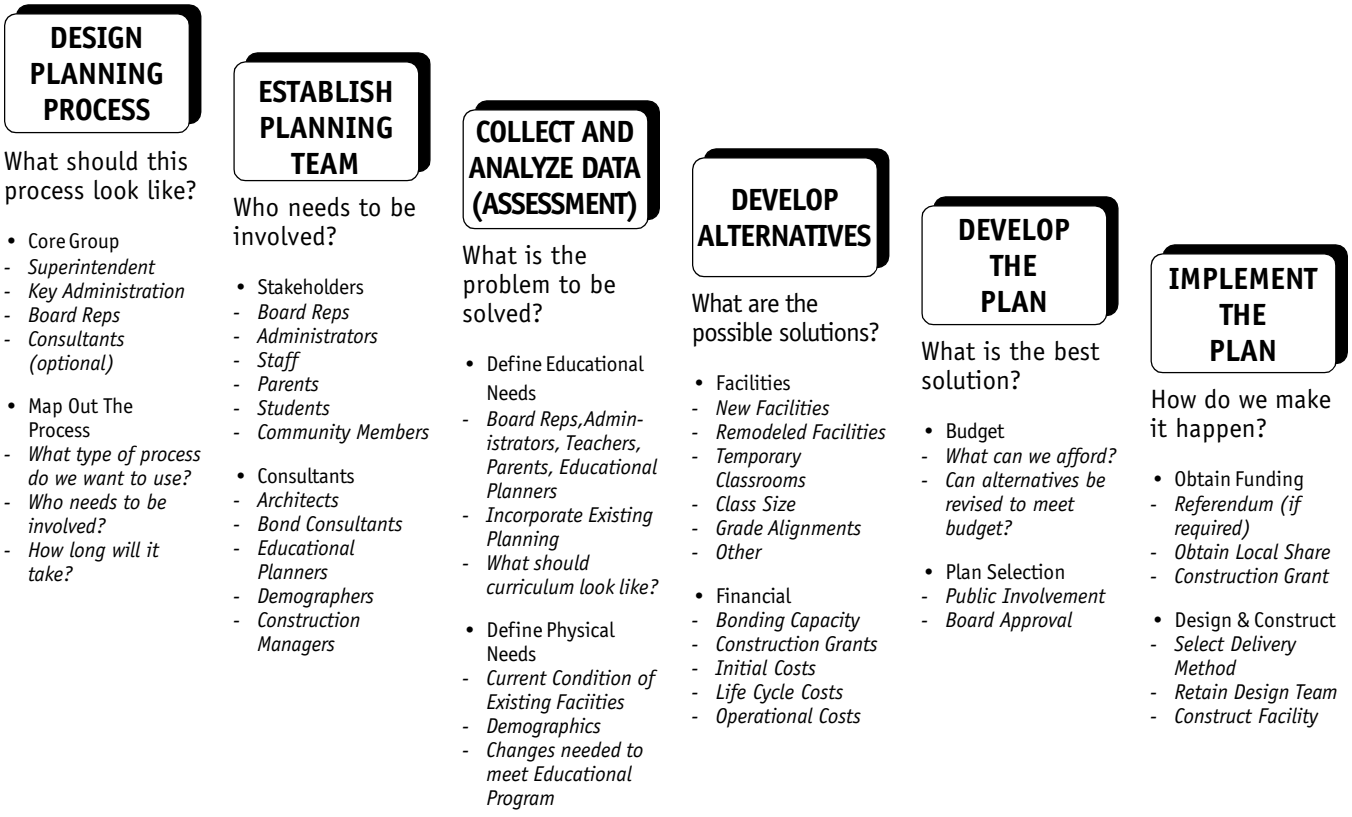
As the planning process unfolds, there are several critical areas that will surface and that will require careful study and deliberation throughout the process. These areas are described in this chapter to assist in generating ideas and considerations by the core planning group. If a thorough and comprehensive planning process has been orchestrated by the core planning group, the results will be an exciting new school facility that will serve as a resource and a valued investment by the community it serves.

I. ASSESSMENT OF NEEDS

To accurately plot a course for the future that will meet the goals of the district, the organization must first evaluate its current status in terms of curriculum scope, the physical condition of its learning environments, the quality of staff and characteristics of students. This is a time-consuming process that will involve many members of the school district. Because a needs assessment study will be the underpinning for all planning efforts, the importance of providing objective, unbiased and accurate analysis, cannot be overemphasized.

Studies have proven that a positive relationship exists between school conditions and student achievement, student behavior and overall instructor performance. They also show that students who attend schools in good repair may score 5 to 11 percentage points higher on national tests. The condition of a school facility impacts positively on attitudes and there are fewer disciplinary problems.

As a school district begins the process of planning new or upgrading existing facilities, an assessment of the school facility needs and a program of public information and awareness of those needs is essential. Without such a program, facility and infrastructure problems will increase and the school district community may become conditioned to a lower standard of school facilities.



Student Enrollment

Far and away the most common impetus for changing a district's way of doing business is its enrollment. A declining, stable or growing student body will mean different things in terms of facility needs. A declining enrollment may cause district facilities to be closed, sold, leased or converted to new spaces that allow the district to expand its curriculum offerings. A stable enrollment could lead to a facilities "status quo" or to construction of activity / curriculum enhancing spaces, i.e., gymnasiums, auditoriums, natatoriums, or entire replacement facilities. An expanding enrollment will cause a district to focus on providing additional basic classroom space to accommodate student growth.

Program

An educational program is essentially a description or the philosophy underpinning the educational programs and of how a district delivers education and provides supportive services within its buildings. When a building is newly constructed, the new (or reconfigured) spaces support the educational program. An analysis of educational activities will reveal any deficits that may exist and help determine the number, size, and characteristics of any resulting space needed.

School Site

For existing schools, the issue of site selection will often dictate whether and how a building can be expanded, determining what configuration the expansion may have and how the building will interface with people and vehicles. For new construction, the selection of the site must take into account access, surroundings, views, local weather, drainage and slope, soil, legal restraints, availability, air space restrictions, availability of financial resources and any local history or ownership issues.

Age and Conditions of Existing Facilities

These factors will dictate if a building is expanded , remodeled, renovated, or replaced. In-depth analysis of structural, mechanical, electrical and architectural systems by licensed professionals is necessary to determine the scope and direction of any facility utilization plan.

Technology

Twenty years ago, there were no real facility support issues associated with technology in the classroom. Today's buildings must not only be planned or adapted to accommodate computer networks and web access but also they must be designed to provide for potential technological requirements, information routing, collection and distribution. New and emerging trends in the utilization of educational technology will replace some traditional teacher responsibilities. As such, technology will become a focal point in the design of the infrastructure of the building, as well as altering the delivery of the educational program in the teaching and learning process.

Energy Conservation

Operating expenses are a constant part of a school district's budget. Unlike bond debt service, capital leases and installment loans, there is no end to the payment flow for staff, supplies and utilities. Comparative analysis of building systems, equipment types and energy usage of comparable school buildings will enable a district to determine its relative level of energy conservation and where possible improvements could be made.

School Code

The Illinois School Code documents the school code and numerous other statutes relevant to public school government and administration. Published annually, by Lexis Publishing for the Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB) (http://www.iasb.com), the School Code sets standards for such facility concerns as heating, lighting, ventilation, sanitation, safety, and maintenance.

Health / Life Safety

The built environment takes its characteristics from not only the shape of its walls, floors and ceilings, but also from what material those surfaces are made of and what conditions they are in, as well as the condition of the engineering systems that light, heat, and service the occupants. In schools these issues are particularly important and regulated by the Illinois School Code 23 and Illinois Administrative Code 180.

Accessibility

With few exceptions, all public buildings in Illinois must be accessible to persons with disabilities. For existing buildings this usually means the modification of entries and corridors. Elevators may be required for multi-story buildings. In addition, all restrooms must be made accessible with wide toilet stalls, grab bars, and lavatory fixtures set at prescribed heights.

School Restructuring

Careful space utilization in a school district can sometimes reduce or eliminate otherwise necessary expansion projects. Districts with multiple facilities can sometimes find additional room or better-suited space for their educational programs by internally shifting class grades between buildings. The opposite occurs however, if class sections are structured without adequate forethought in order to accommodate curriculum changes, state mandates or other external influences.

School District Reorganization

Class offerings in districts with multiple facilities can be organized in a limited number of ways. Schools may be self-contained attendance centers that offer all grade levels to families within their attendance boundaries. Or, school buildings may be organized by grade level, thereby requiring students to move from school to school as they progress through the grades. Districts that change from one organizational model to another are often faced with additional space needs. Interdistrict consolidation / reorganization involves school districts merging with neighboring districts. This combination of staff, assets and land requires districts to evaluate their current facilities in terms of relevant utility, physical condition and for remaining serviceable life and determine how they will be utilized in the newly formed district. These districts must also comply with a formalized reorganization process involving referendum requirements.

Security

School districts have always been required to provide safe learning environments for students. In the past, this meant classrooms that remained dry and warm throughout the school year. Today's schools are required to go beyond the basic need of shelter in order to create the optimal educational environment. The security of students at the school is now a critical part of all new school planning. Likewise, it is almost always an element that must be incorporated into schools more than 15 years in age. Controlled

access to the school, along with effective monitoring of corridor and assembly areas, is a standard step taken by most districts.

II. FINANCIAL PLAN

Historically, in most districts local funds are the primary source for school construction. This may be derived through the issuance of bonds, local property tax levies and certain other minor sources, such as gifts, insurance settlements, sales of property, etc. However, it is important to develop a long range financial forecast as part of the planning process. This financial plan may include, but not be limited to, the following sources of revenue:

District Budget

The Board of Education should pass a resolution allocating a certain percentage of the district budget each year for capital improvements. Addressing continuing maintenance projects in a pro-active manner in the budget will maximize resources and affect future improvements that may be needed.

Bond Issues Through Referendum

A referendum may be passed by a simple majority to authorize the issuance of bonds for a specific project. The maturity on these bonds may range from approximately 15 to 20 years in length. They may be structured in various ways to minimize debt service over the life of the bonds.

Health / Safety Bonds

If it is determined that the construction of a new building may cost less than renovation and repair of a current building and if the new building will be equivalent in area and comparable in purpose and grades served with the new building being replaced, a Life Health Safety analysis can be performed and approved for the issuance of bonds without voter approval. These bonds are subject to the district's debt limit, but may be issued for up to 20 years in length.

Alternate Revenue Bonds

These bonds may be issued and not count against the district's debt limit. However, the payment of the principal and interest on the bonds must be from alternate sources other than property taxes for bond and interest purposes, i.e., state aid, etc. The school code does require a backdoor referendum for the authorization for the bonds and a referendum to build new buildings, even if a revenue source is the source of repayment.

Lease

Leases count against a district's debt limit, and are payable from general funds of the district. A referendum is not needed for new building construction until the end of the lease term because the building is not technically owned by the district.

Senate Bill 840 (Public Act 91-55)

Permits the district to issue bonds in excess of its debt limit to fund its share of school construction project.

Working Cash Fund Bonds

These bonds are issued to fund the Working Cash Fund. Funds may be transferred to the Operations and Maintenance Fund. On the day of issuance, the bonds do not count against the district's debt limit but then become outstanding debt the day after. The amount of these bonds is derived from a formula of :

Equalized Assessed Valuation
x Maximum Educational Fund Tax Rate
+ Personal Property Replacement Tax
x 85%
Less the greater of Working Cash Bonds outstanding or money to the credit of the Working Cash Fund
Equals Dollars Available for Working Cash Fund Bonds

Funding Bonds

These bonds may be issued to pay outstanding contractual claims such as salaries, Teacher Retirement System, Special Education Cooperative etc., without regard to the district's debt limit. They are also subject to a backdoor referendum and may mature up to a maximum of 20 years.

III. MODERNIZING THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

Change is constant in our world and in our schools. Learning environments should be flexible enough to adjust to a wide variety of conditions and accommodate educational goals. As educational programs and strategies are developed and implemented, demands for flexible school facilities escalate. As new technologies are incorporated into the teaching and learning processes, demands for support of these technologies impact both facilities and infrastructure. Projecting what new or expanded programs and services to be accommodated in a school facility is a difficult task. Few school facilities are constructed with additional spaces reserved for growth or program expansion. Many new or renovated schools find they are in need of additional space or reconfiguration within two years of occupying the new facility.

Many new schools are emerging as community centers to support the concept of "community learning." These schools of the future serve multiple functions such as civic centers, senior citizens activities, park district programs, adult education opportunities, etc. Adaptability and flexibility are primary considerations in planning a building to optimize its fullest potential.

Sample educational programs and supportive services that have been implemented in Illinois include:

preschool / early childhood
English as a second language
distance education/ television studio
adult education
extended learning
continuous improvement
breakfast programs
accessibility provisions
day care / latchkey programs
alternative learning programs
communication
early learning

education to careers
fine arts
health services
math
reading
social science
technology
greenhouses
agricultural education
family involvement / parent education
food and nutrition
leadership
physical development and health
science
social services
social, recreational, and cultural opportunities
industrial technology
cooperative education

To ensure that school facilities are meeting the needs of a changing world in the best ways possible, school districts should evaluate and update their educational program on a three-to five-year cycle.

IV. THE SUCCESSFUL REFERENDUM

Profile of a Successful Referendum

- The school board is unanimous in its support of the referendum.
- The campaign is led by citizens from all segments of the district, not the school board and administration.
- The timetable allows for sufficient planning and campaigning.
- The district and supporters are consistent with their message to the voters.
- The message is kept simple; voters are adequately informed.
- Major campaign activities are concentrated in the last few weeks before the election.

Key Steps to a Successful Referendum

- Develop Election Campaign Strategy
- Organize referendum campaign committee.
- Develop subcommittees and outline goals and projects.
- Develop a timetable.

Conduct Voter Registration Program

- Train deputies to register new voters.
- Develop a targeted list of potential new voters.
- Make sure identified supporters are registered to vote.

Develop a Plan to Educate and Persuade Voters

- Keep the message short and simple.
- Be consistent with your message.
- Develop a plan to distribute information:
    - -Door-to-door.
    - -Mass mailings.
    - -Public events / presentations.
    - -Endorsements.
    - -Paid advertising.

Identify "Yes" Voters

- Use historical data to research voter turnout and trends.
- Identify how many votes are needed for approval.
- Develop a plan to identify "Yes" voters:
  - -Telephone canvassing.
  - -Door-to-door canvassing.

Plan Election Day Activities

- Have poll-watchers in each precinct.
- Make phone calls to "Yes" supporters not voting.
- Provide transportation for voters.

Referendum Committee Structure

Steering Committee

Consists of general chairperson and subcommittee chairs and should include school board representation and administration. Keeps track of progress in each subcommittee, acts as a clearinghouse for information. Determines overall campaign strategy and implementation.

Subcommittees

- **Voter Registration**
  Organizes the training of deputy registrars. Develops a plan to target potential voters, such as 18-year-old students, parents, recent graduates and identified supporters. Organizes absentee voter effort.
- **Telephone Canvassing**
  Obtains a voter registration list to identify "yes" voters. Recruits volunteers to make phone calls. Develops a script and call sheet for volunteers. Records "Yes"votes to be used by Poll-watcher Subcommittee.
- **Door-To-Door Canvassing**
  Distributes brochures, flyers and other informational material to community.
- **Sign Distribution**
  Distributes signs to appropriate locations, coordinates its task with the Telephone Canvassing Subcommittee.
- **Marketing**
  Develops brochures and ads, writes press releases and organizes other public presentations and endorsement activities. May also be in charge of developing a web page.
- **Poll-watcher**
  Recruits volunteers that are available on election day to be poll-watchers and trains them for their duties. Recruits volunteers to make calls on election day to identified supporters that have not voted. Works closely with Telephone Canvassing Subcommittee.
- **Finance**
  Solicits financial contributions. Keeps bank account. Files necessary forms with election officials.

V. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Keeping the Community Involved

When members of a community are given the opportunity to take part in meaningful work and important decision-making, the commitment to the project is strengthened. To ensure participation of the community in the design process of a school, adequate time and resources must be dedicated to the planning process. The participants involved in the planning process will vary significantly, based upon the size and type of school construction project and the specific school district. The school board and the superintendent must take the primary roles in involving the community in the school construction and planning process.

Community Involvement Enhances the Following Process

- Assessment of needs.
- Development of alternative project solutions.
- The feasibility study of the solutions.
- Selection of the final solutions to be included in the plan.
- Implementation of the plan.

A tool for maintaining communications throughout the project includes a quarterly or semiannual project update mailed to the community. Groundbreakings, beam signings and dedications provide opportunities for community involvement from the start of construction to the completion of the project.

Other Key Considerations

- What role will the media have in community events?
- Will there be town meetings to solicit input and inform the community of progress?
- Town meetings should include adequate room space, well publicized dates, question and answer time.